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SUBJECT: AFTER THE NATO SUMMIT: GOF LOOKS AHEAD

¶1. (C) Summary. President Sarkozy is reportedly "very satisfied" with his first NATO summit, a meeting which demonstrated to the world the change in France's approach to the Alliance. President Bush's endorsement of a strong European defense in Bucharest gave the GOF the green light it wanted to proceed with its parallel track policy of strengthening European defense capabilities and reintegrating France fully into the military command of NATO. We expect to see movement on both of these tracks during the upcoming French presidency, with an additional emphasis on the question of NATO-EU cooperation. French contacts emphasize that the decision delaying MAP for Georgia and Ukraine did not constitute a "Russian veto" as the moment was simply not ripe for this major strategic decision, but confirm that both countries' future membership has now been affirmed by the Alliance. On Afghanistan, the announcements of troop numbers at the summit were conservative estimates in deference to domestic sensitivities; however, these numbers will swell with an additional deployment of personnel in RC-C for the French command beginning this summer. Special Forces troops may also still be on the table if the need presents. French officials still demur on the subject of Greece/Macedonia, largely pushing the responsibility for finding a compromise onto Macedonia. End summary.

EUROPEAN DEFENSE PLANNING IN THE COMING MONTHS

¶2. (C) In recent meetings at the Elysee and MFA, our contacts made clear that the GOF regarded President Bush's positive remarks at Bucharest -- in which he endorsed the vision of a strong European defense, welcomed France's full return to NATO's integrated structures and addressed the issue of cooperation between NATO and the European Union -- as a clear green light to pursue their dual objectives of promoting European defense structures and reintegrating France back into the military command of NATO. According to Francois Richier, President Sarkozy's Advisor on Strategic Affairs, the GOF plans to use its authority during the EU presidency to "give direction" to European efforts to reinforce military capabilities, promote greater engagement and provide better coherence in organization to avoid duplication of effort. This will build on initiatives already launched

at the French-UK summit, where the two countries discussed cooperation in maritime matters and launched a trust fund on helicopters to upgrade existing European capabilities. Richier said that France will seek ways to encourage all European countries to support increased European defense capabilities, which will then allow those countries which are really engaged to move forward. He added that President Bush's positive remarks at Bucharest provided the necessary backing to the French initiative to spur progress.

FRANCE IN AFGHANISTAN: INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

¶3. (C) President Sarkozy publicly announced at Bucharest two main initiatives for ISAF: a supplemental battalion for RC-East and France's assumption of the command of RC-Central. However, various interlocutors including Richier and Colonel Philippe Montocchio, Deputy of the MOD NATO Section, explained that Sarkozy's public mention of the number of troops as "700" only takes account of the additional battalion for RC-East. Montocchio confirmed that several hundred reinforcements would bolster the French presence in Kabul as well, but added that "there is no need to announce this number to the public." (Richier confided that Sarkozy opted in favor of citing the smallest possible number, to minimize public opposition which was coalescing at the time of the Bucharest summit, with two major

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parliamentary debates providing a platform for critics of the President's "atlanticism" and approach to Afghanistan.) The major outstanding question after Bucharest remains whether France still intends to deploy Special Forces troops, as we'd been informed in the weeks leading up to the summit. Richier said that no decision has yet been made on SOF deployment, as the Elysee is seeking to manage the public and parliamentary debate by incrementally increasing French engagements. Jean-David Levitte, the President's Diplomatic Advisor, offered in a meeting with the Ambassador that the French SOF could still be deployed later as needed.

THE FUTURE FOR GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

¶4. (C) At the Bucharest Summit, Sarkozy united with German Chancellor Angela Merkel against extending MAP to Georgia and Ukraine. But our GOF contacts have been careful since then to reinforce that the decision merely reflected a determination that the moment was not yet ripe for such a significant strategic decision to be made. Richier noted that a major retarding factor for Ukraine's candidacy is that it is not yet politically stable enough to assure that its goal of NATO membership would survive a change of administration in Kiev: If a pro-Russian government were elected in a few years, it could pull out of NATO MAP, embarrassing the Alliance. Montocchio informed us that while Ukraine made a better case than Georgia, it was hurt because its leadership didn't unite behind support for NATO MAP until January, "too late" to prepare for a summit decision in April. Nicolas Niemtchinow, DAS-equivalent in Strategic Affairs at the MFA, cited the

Georgian state of emergency at the end of last year, and the delayed Ukrainian request and low public support as factors that prevented a consensus in favor of Georgia and Ukraine MAP. However, all emphasized that at Bucharest, the Alliance went beyond MAP in affirming unequivocally their future place in NATO. The question now is how far, and how fast, can they progress. Niemtchinow characterized the December ministerial meeting as "the first review," implying that while the process was open-ended, it would continue until a positive decision could be reached. Col. Montocchio pointed out that the language used in the Bucharest summit communique that, "We agreed today that these countries WILL become members of NATO" actually goes beyond MAP because it explicitly invokes a guarantee of NATO membership whereas MAP only promises to launch the formal process. Richier was even more explicit, saying that "we gave them membership, but not the MAP." He regretted that the international press had poorly analyzed and reported on the result.

FRANCE'S NATO REINTEGRATION

15. (C) With regard to NATO reintegration, the advance text of Sarkozy's April 3 remarks contained a phrase that he did not actually deliver, stating his desire to "make the necessary decisions so that France may play its full role in NATO structures in 2009."
(Comment: Here again, Sarkozy likely held back setting a date for rejoining NATO so as to minimize public blow back. End Comment.) Sarkozy's commitment to bringing France back into NATO, like his increasing of French troop levels in Afghanistan, is also contributing to the new salience of opposition to his administration's foreign policy. Richier admitted that the Elysee had "underestimated" the level of the political polemics that they would face on Afghanistan and NATO. Even after the successful

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parliamentary vote against the motion of censure on April 8 (by 548 to 227), he acknowledged that the GOF has a lot of "educating to do, for both the parliament and the public."

MACEDONIA: WON'T PRESSURE GREECE

16. (C) In the post-Bucharest environment, French officials have not retreated from their earlier position on Macedonia; namely, that they hope a compromise will be found on the name issue, but they refuse to put any pressure on Greece. In general, officials in the Elysee, MOD and MFA are sensitive to Greece's domestic political considerations and reiterate that it is up to Macedonia to make the necessary compromises, as Macedonia is the one seeking to join the Alliance. For Richier, the question is not one of capability or Balkan stability, but rather a question of solidarity with a key ally. He noted that in the past, Greece has stood firmly with France on issues when France made it clear that its vital national interests were at

stake. France intends to do the same for its Greek ally in this case. He further noted that some of the proposals rejected by Macedonia had been quite reasonable, and it was up to Skopje to make an effort. These views were echoed in the MFA when Niemtchinow repeatedly stated that the alliance cannot "twist the arms" of a fellow ally and added that, as enlargement is subject to national ratification by member countries, it is not in the interest of the Alliance to make a choice that the Greek government cannot sustain domestically. These comments flow directly from President Sarkozy's speech, in which he stated that when joining an alliance, a country must make "a minimum of effort." Post sees little possibility that this posture will change in the near future, although we continue to urge our interlocutors to advocate a compromise with both Greece and Macedonia.

COMMENT

17. (C) In general, French officials are extremely upbeat over the NATO summit results, which they see as having reached reasonable compromises on difficult issues. A more cautious President Sarkozy appeared at Bucharest, reflecting a perceived need to manage the political debate at home. But the French agenda for NATO remains robust, showing increased commitment in Afghanistan, openness towards further enlargement and building on the statements by President Bush (validated by Chancellor Merkel) for France to progress this coming year in two of its most important policy objectives: reintegration and European defense. The fact that the 60th anniversary summit will be held in the towns of Strasbourg and Kehl, which straddle the border between France and Germany, is their highly symbolic icing on the cake. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at: <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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